

Message Text

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TAGS: ELTN, GB

SUBJECT:DEPUTY SECRETARY'S MEETING WITH GABONESE MINISTER
OF STATE RAWIRI

1. DEPUTY SECRETARY INGERSOLL MET WITH MINISTER OF
STATE RAWIRI FEBRUARY 19. MEETING FOLLOWED TWO-DAY SERIES
OF DISCUSSIONS IN WASHINGTON WITH EXECUTIVES SEVERAL
AMERICAN COMPANIES AND SENIOR USG OFFICIALS. SEPTELS AND
MEMCONS WILL REPORT ON SUBSTANCE OF PRIVATE AND GOVERNMENT
TALKS.

2. US-GABONESE COMMERCIAL RELATIONS. THE DEPUTY SECRETARY
EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR WARM WELCOME EXTENDED US PRIVATE
ENTERPRISE. STATED HE LIKED GABON'S SPIRIT OF COMPETITION
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AND CONGRATULATED THE MINISTER ON GABON'S AMBITIOUS PLANS.

3. IN REPLY, RAWIRI DESCRIBED GABON'S PAST ECONOMIC HISTORY AND PRESENT PHILOSOPHY. RAWIRI STRESSED THAT GABON HAS MADE CONTINUOUS EFFORT SINCE INDEPENDENCE TO DIMINISH FRENCH INFLUENCE AND TO DIVERSIFY ITS ECONOMY IN ORDER TO ASSURE YOUTH THAT SITUATION HAD INDEED CHANGED FROM COLONIAL PERIOD. WHILE GABON DID NOT INTEND TO BREAK ITS HISTORIC TIES WITH FRANCE, GABON WISHED TO DEVELOP IN ITS OWN INTEREST COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER COUNTRIES.

CALLING FOR INCREASED US-GABONESE ECONOMIC COOPERATION, RAWIRI ASKED THE DEPUTY SECRETARY'S ASSISTANCE IN ENCOURAGING MORE AMERICAN BUSINESSMEN TO DISCOVER GABON'S INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES.

4. TRANS-GABON RAILROAD. THE DEPUTY SECRETARY AND RAWIRI REVIEWED HISTORY OF THE PROJECT. RAWIRI STATED GOG WANTS TO MOVE AHEAD ON THE RAILROAD IN ORDER TO END THE CABLE CAR SYSTEM THROUGH CONGO-BRAZZAVILLE. RAWIRI CITED THE POWER TRANSMISSION AREA AND HARBOR FACILITIES AS POTENTIAL U.S. INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES. HE INFORMED THE DEPUTY SECRETARY THAT MORRISON-KNUDSEN HAS BEEN ASKED TO SUBMIT A PROPOSAL FOR CIVIL ENGINEERING FOR THE BOOUE-MEKAMBO LEG OF THE RAILROAD. MINISTER NOTED THAT AMERICAN COMPANIES (US STEEL AND BETHLEHEM STEEL) ARE DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN MINING OPERATIONS WHICH WILL BE CONSIDERABLY ENHANCED BY THE RAILROAD. HE REASONED THAT IT WAS IN US INTEREST TO HAVE THE PRIVATE SECTOR PARTICIPATE IN AUXILIARY PROJECTS WHICH WILL IMPROVE THE RAILROAD'S EFFICIENCY. THE DEPUTY SECRETARY INDICATED THAT THIS IS AN OPPORTUNE TIME TO LOOK TOWARD THE AMERICAN PRIVATE SECTOR AND ENCOURAGED RAWIRI TO MAKE THESE INVESTMENT POSSIBILITIES KNOWN. DEPUTY SECRETARY ADDED THAT INVESTMENT IN GABON WOULD BE ATTRACTIVE VENTURE.

5. US ASSISTANCE. THE MINISTER REFERRED TO GABON'S LABEL AS A WEALTHY COUNTRY. COMMENTING AGAIN ON GABON'S FRANCOPHONE HERITAGE, RAWIRI STATED THE ADMINISTRATION OF FRENCH EQUATORIAL AFRICA IGNORED INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT IN GABON, WHICH HAD CONTRIBUTED MORE THAN HALF OF THE COLONIAL OFFICIAL USE

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NIAL REGION'S BUDGET, AND FAVORED CONGO-BRAZZAVILLE. GOG IS NOW TRYING TO OVERCOME THIS HANDICAP AND AS A RESULT HAS ACCUMULATED A SUBSTANTIAL DEBT. IN PLEA FOR US ASSISTANCE, MINISTER SAID GABON NEEDED US TECHNICAL KNOW-HOW.

6. CONTINUING ON AID MATTERS, RAWIRI ASKED THE DEPUTY SECRETARY'S SUPPORT IN TERMS OF US ASSISTANCE IN AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING. GABON ANTICIPATES A SERIOUS

FOOD SUPPLY PROBLEM WILL DEVELOP IN COMING MONTHS WHEN THOUSANDS OF IMMIGRANTS ARRIVE TO WORK ON THE TRANS-GABON. RAWIRI MENTIONED THAT GOG WOULD LIKE US ASSISTANCE IN BANANA AND MANIOC CULTIVATION.

7. AT CLOSE OF MEETING THE DEPUTY SECRETARY EXPRESSED HOPE HE MIGHT SOMEDAY BE ABLE TO VISIT GABON AND SEE THE RAILROAD. RAWIRI REMARKED THAT THE DEPUTY SECRETARY'S PRESENCE IN GABON WOULD BE WELCOME AND WOULD HAVE GREAT IMPACT ON THE GABONESE PEOPLE. KISSINGER

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